

By John M. Goshko
Washington Post Staff Writer

Just before Zubin Mehta, musical director of the New York Philharmonic, was to conduct a "World Peace Concert" at the United Nations on March 27, he complained that a U.N. biographical sketch had omitted one of his proudest distinctions—that he is "conductor for life" of the Israel Philharmonic.

On orders from Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, the United Nations hastily expressed regrets and revised the program notes to reflect Mehta's close ties to Israel. But the United Nations still buzzes with speculation about whether the incident was an oversight or an example of anti-Israeli bias.

Supporters of the Jewish state charge that such bias is endemic to the United Nations, an organization that for 15 years has had on its books a resolution stating that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination."

The world body's attitude toward Israel is pertinent because of persistent calls for the U.N. Security Council to take the lead role in a new effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab states and such European powers as the Soviet Union and France have argued that the council's prominent role in ending Iraq's occupation of Kuwait should be expanded to bring a comprehensive peace to the broader Middle East region.

Throughout the Persian Gulf crisis, these countries called repeatedly for an international conference on the Middle East, under the auspices of the council's five permanent members: the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain and China. Although that idea has been put on the back burner while the United States explores the chances of bringing the region's antagonists to the bargaining table, pressures persist for some kind of U.N. role in the Mideast peace process.

Arab governments, Palestinian groups and their sympathizers in Europe are urging that unless U.S. peace efforts begin to show results, the matter of a Mideast conference should be bucked back to the Security Council. In his three recent trips to the region, Secretary of State James A. Baker III was unable to persuade Syria to drop its insistence that the United Nations be part of any peace negotiation.

But Israel remains adamantly against conceding any role in its affairs to the United Nations. In Israel's view, the United Nations would seek to impose on it terms that have been dictated in advance by the Arabs and that would amount to a literal death warrant for the Jewish state.

That underscores how far Israel's view of the United Nations has moved since 1948 when Israel was born out of a U.N. plan to create separate Jewish and Arab states out of Palestine, which had been under British mandate since the end

of World War I. The Arabs rejected the plan, but the Jewish settlers in Palestine seized on the U.N. plan to declare their independence and, after defeating the combined forces of the Arab world, emerged in control of most of what had been Palestine.

Israel's subsequent victory over the Arabs in the 1967 Middle East War extended Israel's territorial control to include the entire city of Jerusalem and the Palestinian-inhabited West Bank and Gaza Strip. That led to U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, calling for withdrawal from occupied territories in exchange for the right of all states in the region to live in peace and security.

However, there are widely differing interpretations of what Resolution 242 means. The Arabs contend that the resolution requires Israel to withdraw from all the territory it occupied in 1967 and turn it over to those Palestinians under Israeli occupation or in exile. Israel counters that it has a claim to some or even all of this land for reasons of history and self-defense, and it opposes an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories as a potentially mortal danger to Israel.

More U.N. members have come to support the Arab view, particularly since the 1960s when decolonization swelled U.N. ranks with scores of new nations in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. These younger nations, which form the majority of the one-nation, one-vote General Assembly, nearly universally back the Arab position on Palestine.

From Israel's point of view, the symbolic low point of life in the United Nations came on Oct. 3, 1975, when the General Assembly, by a vote of 72 to 35, with 32 abstentions, passed a resolution equating Zionism with racism.

The assembly also granted observer status to the Palestine Liberation Organization and created the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a panel that frequently has criticized Israel for its treatment of Palestinians, called for establishment of an independent Palestinian state and advocated internationalizing Jerusalem under United Nations control.

The committee's recommendations that its position be adopted by the Security Council as the basis for an international conference have been blocked by the United States.

"Whether you agree or not, it's hardly surprising that Israel has no enthusiasm for a conference that would start with premises like those," said a U.N. diplomat who asked not to be identified. "The end of the Cold War greatly enhanced the U.N.'s ability to mediate effectively in all manner of regional disputes—in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, southern Africa, Central America and elsewhere. But when it adopted the 'Zionism is racism' resolution, it canceled, probably for all time, its chances of having an effect on the Arab-Israeli conflict."

Israel Supporters Reject U.N. as Mideast Mediator

Perception of Bias Clouds Credibility

Having followed Goshko's coverage of the State Department for years and having personal knowledge of his not reporting what he knew his sources there would not like I believe this story signals the end of the Busk/Baker/ State effort to bludgeon Israel into what it would have trouble surviving. It is written in a way that can be intended to calm concerned American Jews (aka voters and campaign financiers). It also includes facts I do not recall seeing in the Post before. They give a somewhat different view than the Post has expressed consistently, as news and as opinion.